

RATANBAI:



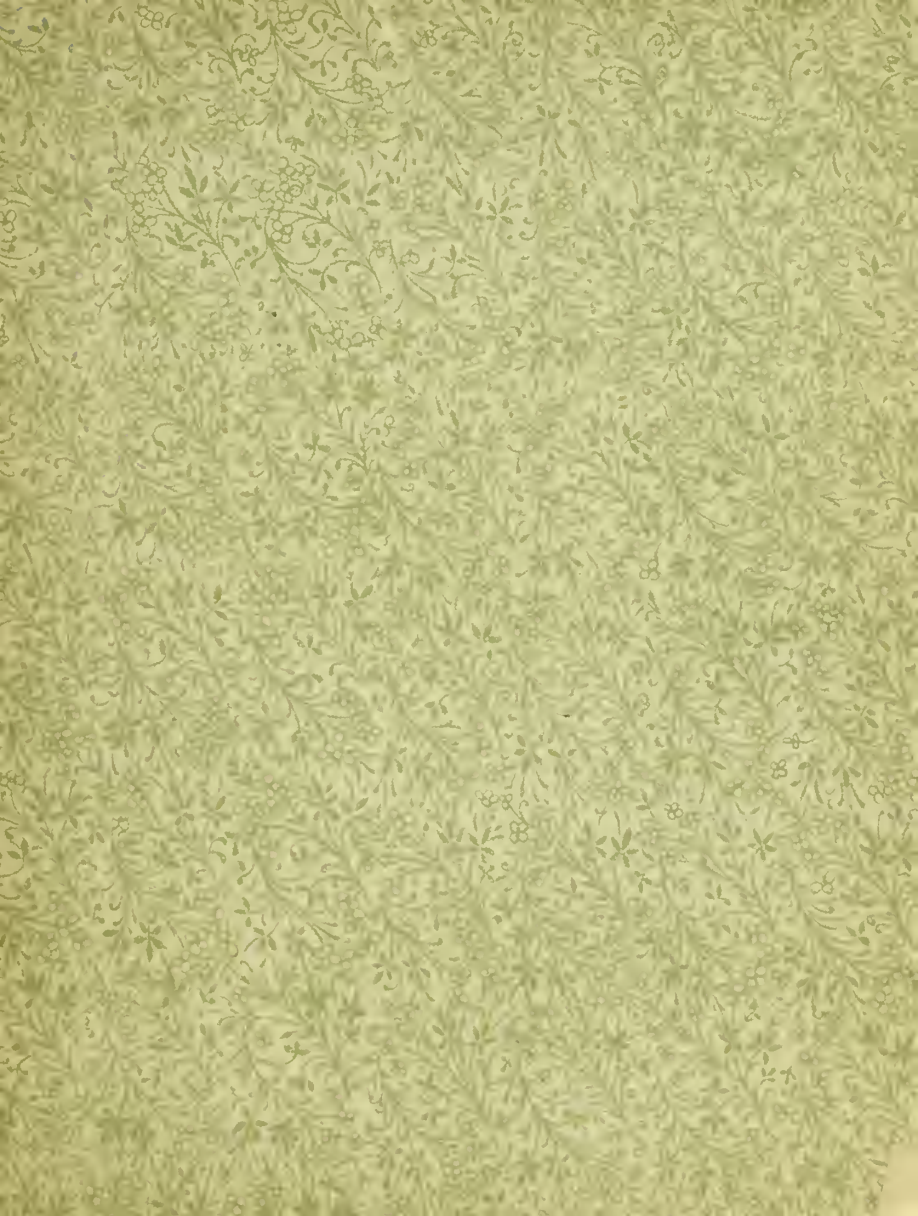
SHĒVANTIBĀI M. NIKAMBĒ




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RATAN BAI:

A SKETCH OF A BOMBAY HIGH CASTE
HINDU YOUNG WIFE.

BY

SHÈVANTIBĀI M. NIKAMBÈ.

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*WITH A PREFACE BY THE LADY HARRIS, C.I.*  
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—
1895.

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By special permission most graciously accorded,

This Book is Dedicated

with profound gratitude and loyalty

TO

HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY THE QUEEN,
EMPRESS OF INDIA,

BY

SHEVANTIBĀI M. NIKAMBÈ.

PREFACE

BY

HER EXCELLENCY THE LADY HARRIS, C.I.

I have much pleasure in writing these few lines, and feel sure that the readers of this Hindu story will be interested to hear that the Authoress is the head of a Hindu School for high caste girls, and therefore has had every opportunity for studying their characteristics.

The School is of immense help to her countrywomen, who are, as a rule, prevented from being properly trained in sometimes even the simplest forms of education by their high caste and their early marriages, which, as a rule, prevent girls from going to school after twelve years of age—the very time when our English girls are beginning to see more clearly the advantages of education. A

married Hindu lady naturally does not like to go to big Native schools: it being undignified in their ideas to learn with girls, perhaps of not such high caste as their own, or else unmarried.

Mrs. Nikambe's School was started in November 1890 with five pupils. Before she opened this school she was engaged in educational work amongst the high caste girls and women in Bombay: she was the head mistress of a Hindu girls' school in connexion with the well-known and influential society called the "Students' Literary and Scientific Society." She saw the disadvantages and difficulties the little Hindu wives had in getting a decent education after they were married.

Ever since her school has been started, the young wives, widows, and grown up girls of the high caste community have taken advantage of it. Young mothers have come, too.

I have myself visited Mrs. Nikambe's school—a visit that gave me great pleasure; and I was charmed with what I saw and heard, and think

Mrs. Nikambe worthy of all praise for carrying on with so much earnestness a greatly needed work.

I feel sure that all married Hindu ladies must be happier and better for an education which, whilst not too engrossing, must be elevating to themselves their children, and homes.

ADA HARRIS.



In placing this humble work before the public (my very first attempt), I have to thank and praise God with all my heart for help and strength, especially in my late illness, during which time it was written.

I feel I must record my deep indebtedness to Her Gracious Majesty the Queen, our beloved Empress, for so graciously granting me the permission to dedicate this small work to Her Majesty, whose happy rule in my dear native land is brightening and enlightening the lives and homes of many Hindu women.

My warmest thanks are due to Her Excellency the Lady Harris, C.I., the wife of the late Governor of Bombay, for her deep interest in India's women, and for so kindly writing the preface to this book. I have also to thank Miss Manning for looking over the proofs and suggesting corrections.

SHĒVANTIBĀI M. NIKAMBĒ.

London, June 1895.

RATANBAI.

CHAPTER I.

YOUNG Ratanbai is a pleasing girl of eleven. Her father's name is Vāsudevrāv Kāshināth Dalvi, and her mother's, Anandibāi. Mr. Vāsudevrāv is a successful lawyer of the High Court. Every morning he is busy with his clients in the office room, which is very comfortably furnished. A rich carpet covers the floor ; a cushioned sofa stands at one side, a dozen chairs in a row at the other, a handsome cabinet containing a large collection of law books opposite, and there are two good windows looking to the front. The walls are prettily decorated, and portraits of great men, mostly literary, hang in a most uncomfortable fashion high up against the roof. Mr. Vāsudevrāv likes his home

to be well furnished, and once in a way he does give his spare time to this matter ; but generally he only makes the purchases and sends them home, leaving all to his clerk Narayanrao, who, though a clever and an honest man, knows little about making a room attractive.

One morning, as Mr. Vāsudavrāv is busy with his clients, little Ratanbai, a pet with her father, walks in, and, carrying a chair to the window, kneels on it and looks out on the road. She is dressed, as all Hindu girls are, in a skirt of the *khan** material, and a short-sleeved satin jacket. Her tiny fair wrists are covered with gold bracelets, six on each, with a couple of gold stone bangles between. Round her neck is a *mangalsutra*†, a “*sa-ri*,”‡ a “*goph*.”|| Her ears have diamond and pearl ear-rings. Her hair is parted in the middle, brushed, well oiled, and tied into a

* The Hindu ladies' cloth.

† The wedding symbol. It is a necklace of small black beads, with a pretty gold ornament in the middle.

‡ A heavy gold neck ornament.

|| A beautifully woven ornament of fine real gold strings. It fits round the neck.

neat knot at the back. Upon this knot she wears a brooch-like jewel, over which a "*zeni*"* is fixed. Her skirt reaches her ankles; but as she kneels, it is a bit untidy, and one can see her pretty grape-patterned anklets. Two toes, the first and the third, have silver rings. Ratanbai stayed at the window for a few moments, then getting off the chair, she stood by the table, watching her learned father as he dictated to half a dozen clerks who squatted on the floor and scribbled away with reed pens. She looked charming. Her fair complexion made her to be classed amongst the pretty girls of Bombay. As she stood in a careless dreamy way looking at the flying pens of the clerks, her kind father's attention was turned towards her, and thoughts seemed to crowd into his head while he stretched lazily on his chair. Then coming to himself, and putting his velvet cap straight, he again attended to his work. No one knew what filled his mind with care, and child Ratan did not notice her father at all. She little knew the anxiety her good parent had had ever since her marriage.

Ratanbai had been married two years before into a

* A wreath of flowers.

wealthy but an uneducated family. The promise was made by the mother with the father's consent, when the girl was a baby, and the arrangement had to be fulfilled, though it had been against the real wish of the educated father. Unfortunately, four months after the marriage, her father-in-law, Harischandra Sadāshiva, a successful merchant and a wealthy landowner, died, and his widow, according to the rules of the caste, had to live under the shelter of her husband's brother, who was rich, but not very pleasant to deal with. His wife, who belonged to the country, was ignorant, and always made matters worse through sheer want of education. Ratanbai's mother-in-law, then, was in great trouble, and Mr. Vāsudevṛāv became at times full of grief, for it was clear that Ratan's young husband, who was prosecuting his studies at College, would soon be obliged to take up the management of the affairs, and this would indeed come in the way of his studies. Such a necessity was a great disappointment to Mr. Vāsudevṛāv, whose great aim was to have as his son-in-law a learned man, and, if possible, one who would be a lawyer. Every time he looked at Ratanbai, his only surviving and therefore darling child, anxiety filled his mind.

In about half-an-hour, Mr. Vasudevraṇ was at breakfast. The dining room was dismal looking, with only a dozen low flat stools to boast of as furniture. It was, however, very clean, and we will mention the details of the meal.

Mr. Vāsudevṛāṇ seats himself on one of the stools, before which is a large silver "*tāt*,"* "a *vāṭi*,"† a silver water jug and cup. He is dressed in a rich maroon "*mughṭa*."‡ The upper part of his body is bare, the sacred thread hangs across his shoulder ; a gold ornament, like a handsome bracelet, is tightly fixed above his elbow, and a pearl earring is in the upper part of his ear. His head is shaved, except at the back, whence hang curly jet tresses. He is a tall, fine-looking man. As soon as he sits down, his wife, Anandibai, gently and modestly steps in, and sitting on the floor pours a little water into the plate, and running her fingers through, throws the water into a corner near by, when a cup full of rice is laid in it by the cook with

* A large plate.

† A cup.

‡ The habit worn by gentlemen when dining.

“*varana*”* over it. Anandibai brings in a “*vāṭi*”† of butter, and pours a couple of teaspoonfuls over the rice. In the meantime, the “*polli*,”‡ the vegetables, and the pickles, and sweets and fruits are served, and Mr. Vāsudevrāv, alone and in silence, devours his fresh hot breakfast. Sometimes he asks for more of some dish which Anandibai serves. He tries some more rice, with milk and home-made curds, and, finishing the sweets and the fruits, draws a bright-polished brass basin closer, washes his hands, and looks for a napkin, which his good wife hands to him. He now walks straight up to his room to dress, which operation takes very little time, for everything is lying ready, and a servant is present to help in the way of drawing on the boots, &c.

Meantime Ratanbai had had her breakfast, and was ready also. The carriage—a handsome landau, drawn by a pair of fine white horses, a gift from one of the clients—came to the door. Mr. Vāsudevrāv, who is dressed in a long white coat and trousers, with a handsome red

* A preparation of a kind of pulse always used with rice.

† Cup.

‡ Cake or scone.

turban, gets in first, and little Ratanbai seats herself opposite him. With two footmen at the back of the carriage, and a messenger by the coachman's side, they drive through the crowded, busy streets. After ten minutes the carriage stopped. One of the footmen not in livery jumped down, and helping Ratanbai out, walked behind her with her bag of school books into a large broad stone house, and placing the bag in its place, left Ratanbai among her friends, saying loudly before leaving, "Ratanbai, please be ready ; I have been told to come for you at two o'clock to-day, so I will bring your milk and then take you home." At this Ratanbai looked at him and simply nodded her head. The carriage in the meantime drove on to the High Courts, and the servant, after seeing Ratanbai at school, made calls on his friends, and had a short smoke and nap before returning home.

The bell rang and the girls went into their respective class rooms. Let us go into the III. Standard Class. It is upstairs, and we must needs ascend the broad staircase. The room is well ventilated and suitably furnished. There are twelve girls in the class, all young wives. Three are dressed in the "*sari*," and the rest like Ratanbai. At the head of the class is our friend Ratanbai, looking intelligent

and modest as she stands up to read the third verse of "Casabianca." She reads it distinctly, with expression, as if she understood every word, and then she follows the next reader by looking into her book. A visitor might at once perceive how well behaved and good Ratanbai is at school. She never joins in any sort of mischief, is never found inattentive, in fact, she is, as her teacher is delighted to say, "the nicest girl that attends our school."

At one o'clock the servant brought her tiffin-milk and cake; the former in a silver cup, and the latter in a silver basket. Ratanbai did not go out of the class when her servant arrived, as some of the girls did, but she waited until the "recess hour"; then she went quietly into the tiffin room, seated herself on the floor, and drank the milk first and then eat the cake. After washing her hands at the pipe in the outer room, she ran upstairs to her teacher, ascertained her lessons for the next day, then bidding good-bye in her sweet way, with a smile and a gentle nod of the head, putting on her "shalu,"* she walked out, the servant again behind her with her bag, and drove home.

Anandibai, her mother, was at her toilet. She was

* A silk shawl with gold thread.

seated on the floor before a looking glass, with caskets of jewellery near, and was just taking a pair of pearl studs out of her ear, when Ratan ran in and embraced her.

“Go to Gangu,” said the mother, “and she will do your hair, and then I want you to wear your ‘*pilav*’* to-day. We are to go to ‘*Māvashi’s phūlē.*’”†

By four o’clock the mother and the daughter were dressed, and the brougham was at the door. Ratanbai wore a light blue *pilav* with gold trimming. Her jacket was of pink satin, most elaborately worked with gold thread and pearls. She had on a set of pearl jewellery, and wore a handsome nose-ring. Gracefully raising the edge of her dress, she jumped into the carriage, her mother, who was very neatly attired, follows, and with two attendants they drove through the bustling streets into one of the newly-built stone bungalows in Girgaum. As they neared the house, they heard the “*vajantri*,”‡ or tom-tom. Anandibai and Ratan got out, and were led into the hall, which was most grandly arranged. The chairs, sofas, and tables were

* A silk sari—like the Parsi.

† The flower ceremony of the maternal aunt.

‡ The native band.

moved into another room ; a rich carpet spread, the chandeliers and wall lamps were uncovered and lit. The Hindu ladies dressed all alike, but in variegated colours, were seated in groups on the carpet. Some were talking, some helping themselves to "*pan supari*,"* and some putting the flowers in their hair. There were about a hundred in the room, and yet the entrance was crowded. The ladies looked very dignified as they entered, dressed in different kinds of *saris*, with the handsome-coloured cashmere shawls thrown over their shoulders. Each meets the hostess, then takes a seat amidst the crowd, and looks round about at the house, &c., and is soon lost in talk. Anandibai and Ratanbai, being the nearest relatives, go into the inner room first, and then into the outer hall.

Anandibai's youngest sister, Champubai, is married into this house. She is a lovely girl of fourteen, and it is on her account that this festivity takes place. In about an hour Champubai, most gorgeously dressed in the handsomest silk and gold, and with abundant jewellery, walks into the room, when every eye is turned to her. She takes her seat in the lovely pandal especially put up for the occasion—

* The leaves and betel nut—the hospitality of the Hindus.

on a velvet-cushioned chair—and, placing her jewelled feet on a low stool, she sits — a picture of perfect beauty. The oval face, the light olive complexion, the lovely black expressive eyes, the chiselled nose, and the small mouth, all go to make Champubai one of the beauties of Bombay. Her luxuriant jet hair is hung in a plait decorated with flowers of the sweetest scent ; an artistic net of jessamine buds covers her head, and her forehead from ear to ear is edged by a piece of pearl lace, and an ornament of about the size of a shilling is suspended by a pearl string at the parting. Her ears are masses of beautiful pearls and diamonds, and so are the arms and the neck. The *pilav* she wears is of a soft pink, and worked all over with gold. Her delicate feet have ornaments like Ratanbai's, only these are larger. The pandal is against a large handsome mirror, and is like a fairy bower, arranged with plants, and lamps, and candles. At the side of Champubai are two dais, which is occupied by young girls dressed gracefully ; amongst them, to the right hand, is little Ratanbai.

The ladies of the house are in a state of confusion and bustle. There are so many duties to be carried out, but no arrangement had been made beforehand as to who to

perform them. Finally, the hostess tells one to go to the distribution of cocoanuts, two to the serving of spiced milk, one to distribute the flowers, another to attend to the *pan supari*; while she herself attends to her daughter-in-law. She carries a silver tray with the following articles in it: a little rice, a tiny box of "kunku,"* and a small lamp, and places the tray at the feet of Champubai. Holding the lamp up to Champubai's face, she waves it in the usual way, and putting a promissory note of Rs. 50 in her daughter-in-law's hand, places the lamp in the tray, and applies the "kunku" and rice between the eyebrows, extending this last ceremony to Ratanbai and the other little girls.

After this an unusual noise prevails, and much confusion follows in distributing the sweets and serving the milk; the last is done in another room, the ladies going in groups of ten or twelve. A little after lamp light all is over, yet the poorer and older women of the caste keep on coming, if not to witness the ceremony, at least to receive sweets and cocoanuts. Anandibai and Ratanbai are urged to take

* The red stuff with which the ladies make the dot on the forehead.

dinner, which they do hurriedly, for Anandibai is anxious to get home to her husband. To her surprise and Ratan's pleasure, Mr. Vasudevrao calls for them in the carriage before proceeding home. The gentlemen of the house, however, urge him to get out and remain a while, which he does. He is led into the drawing room, and the hospitality of *pan supari* is offered. After some jokes they begin to talk on the topics of the day, and so engrossed was Mr. Vasudevrao in the conversation that Anandibai goes home alone with Ratanbai and sends the carriage back for her husband.

For a whole week Champubai was engaged in this way with ceremonies, and each day she was dressed in a different way. One day like a "*bhatin*,"* the second day like a "*vanin*,"† the third day like a parsi lady, and so on, and all these days Ratanbai is kept away from school. Finally her mother pronounces there are no more festivities, and that Ratan can attend school. But the next day a message comes from the mother-in-law that she was required there for a certain ceremony at her husband's sister's house. To

* Is a term used by the Gaud Brahmins for the Brahmin lady.

† Bania lady.

her mother-in-law's then she went for a week. Ratanbai never liked going to "*sàsar*,"* for she was not allowed any freedom there. She had always to be helping with something or other, and to be in complete subjection to everyone. She could not take her school possessions to that house, for it was her mother-in-law's sister-in-law who was the ruling person in the home, and she was already educated in the old style, and was most averse to "new or reformed ideas." Ratanbai's mother-in-law was nobody there. So Ratanbai dared not carry a lesson book into that home, and the consequence was that the bright happy child was turned into a miserable girl for a week. Sitting idly for hours, helping to clean the vegetables and grain, gossiping with the neighbouring girls of her age, listening to all sorts of talk of the elderly women were the usual occupations of Ratanbai at the "*sàsar*." She could not feel happy in this cheerless life. All the members of the family were a terror to the child. From the day she arrived to the day she left all kinds of remarks would be made, and especially remarks that hurt her. Something about her father and mother, about being sent to school

* The father-in-law's house.

and being "*learned*," was constantly falling on her ears. Yet she did not say a word, did not show signs of unpleasantness. Her duty was to please, and to be most obedient. How often she thought of the school, and the companions and the teachers, and longed to be amongst them ! But as a married girl her lot was first of all with her husband's people. Very likely if her father-in-law had been alive, her mother-in-law would have removed her from school after her tenth birthday, but to please Ratan's father she was very quiet.

At last the day for her returning to her parents arrived, and Ratan longed to fly as a bird ; but, no ! she must wait till she is sent for. The carriage, after taking the gentlemen to the office and the college, came back, and with the permission of her mother-in law, she went back to her parents. How pleased she was to be again at her dear home ! Now she might fly from one room to another, and be petted and caressed by all, a little queen among the servants. The silent patient "*sūna*"* became again a free bright happy child. The unkind words that had

* Daughter-in-law.

been uttered, the harsh way in which she has been treated, she dared not mention to her mother or fond father, for telling them would only make matters worse. The mother-in-law and others connected would simply have shown themselves more tyrannical. First, when Ratanbai began her visits to her "*sàsar*,"* she would cry, and tell her parents of these unkind manners, but that made her parents grieve, and if they ventured to speak about it even in a right way it simply went badly for Ratānbai, so though she felt all this very keenly, she bore it silently and dutifully.

The day she returned to her parents her first duty was to attend to her lessons. Asking the servant to bring her bag, she took it into her father's office, and, seated on the floor, opened it, taking out all the books one by one, carefully examined them. After giving the books and other articles a thorough airing, she replaced them neatly, keeping, however, one book out. This she opened and read, learning her poetry and spelling by heart. Then, taking her home exercise book, she wrote out her exercises on her father's desk, using his ink and pen. Her heart

* Father-in-law's house.

was happy at the thought of going to school the next day.

Whenever Ratanbai was at home Anandibai was very regular in getting the wreaths, and Ratanbai had one put in her hair. Her mother that afternoon made a call, and Ratanbai was allowed to accompany her. Before lamplight they returned, and while Anandibai was busily occupied in household duties, Ratanbai took out a piece of needlework, and in the office room awaited the return of her father. She merrily hummed one of the infant school tunes, and was then singing softly a Sanskrit *shloka*, when the sound of the carriage was heard, and Ratanbai, flinging down her work, ran to the window, but to her disappointment, instead of the carriage with her father in it she saw a hack victoria with a load of luggage. Two months before, an old widowed aunt of Ratanbai's father had gone on a pilgrimage to Benares. Mr. Vasudevrao had provided her with attendants, &c., and the arrival of this victoria means that the old lady had returned. The servants crowded to take the luggage, and then the old lady was helped out. She was dressed in pure white, and covered from the head to a little above her ankles. Her head

was shaved, and the "*pātal*"* so carefully covered it that you could only see her tired face, which in its day had been attractive. Embracing Ratanbai and her mother, she pronounced her blessing, and sat down in a wearied fashion. Anandibai and Ratanbai sit beside her, and ask as to what kind of a journey she had, whether the train was crowded, and how many were returning from the pilgrimage, &c. Each question received a lengthy answer, and the attendants here and there helped to make the replies still more lengthy.

After a while Anandibai rose and walked towards the kitchen, and the old lady, understanding that it was to give an order for her supper, said : "Do not trouble. I will just take milk."

"Kakubai," says Ratanbai's mother, "you will have a little rice, surely?"

"Well, if it is hot; but do not cook any fresh for me."

"Oh, it will be no trouble, for we have not dined yet."

"What! not dined! Vāsudevvrāv is not at home yet, I suppose?"

* A white sari.

“No ; *Baba** must be at the Club to-day,” said Ratanbai.

The old lady here rose, and carrying a bundle from amongst the luggage to where Ratanbai sat, opened it, and took up several bags and gave them to her. Rejoicing over them, she exclaimed, “Kaku, have you brought all these for me ?”

“Yes, birdie, they are for you,” said the auntie, pinching Ratan’s chin.

The creaking sound of the English boots announced Mr. Vasuderrav’s return home. He had been to a lecture in the “Hindu Club.” The *Bhaya*† at the door stands up and says, “*Sheth, Kakubai aye hai.*”‡ With feelings of pleasure and astonishment he entered the house, and found Kakubai and Ratanbai sitting together. After exchanging greetings, they talked for a while, when it was announced that “dinner is served.” Mr. Vāsudevvrāv takes a few minutes to wash and dress, and is in his old seat ; Anandibai is helping in the serving. As usual they sat talking after

* Father.

† Caretaker.

‡ Sir, Kakubai has come.

dinner, and Kakubai gave a long account of her pilgrimage, so that they all, even Ratanbai, retired at a late hour.

For two weeks Ratanbai is now able to go regularly to school. Every evening she might be seen sitting beside Kakubai, relating the day's incidents, and giving an enthusiastic account of the happy hours spent with the Bai (Mistress) and the teachers in the girls' school.



A SHENVI BRAHMIN GIRL.
(A Pupil in Mrs. Nikambé's School.)



CHAPTER II.

ONE evening, Ratanbai was sitting beside her mother and Kakubai sewing, when the latter asked whether Shamrav's daughter had returned from Goa. Shamrav was a distant relative, and his daughter was attending the same school as Ratanbai.

Ratanbai. Yes ; for she came to see Bai (the school-mistress) yesterday, with Muktabai, her younger sister.

Kakubai. Both the girls are grown up now, and the father-in-law will remove them from school.

Ratanbai. We heard last week that Nanibai (Shamrav's elder girl) was not coming to school any more ; but Nanibai told me yesterday that her mother-in-law has allowed her six months more, so she will be in school until “ *Diwali*.”*

* A Festival.

Kakubai. Is Muktabai to go to school?

Ratanbai. Yes ; she is coming also. Her husband is going up for the B.A. this year. If he passes, then he intends trying for the LL.B. ; but if he fails in that, he must get an appointment, and then, probably, Muktabai will have to leave school. In our school there are five who intend going up for the Matriculation Examination, and one of them is Ghanashampant's daughter—Krishnabai.

Kakubai and Anandibai were very much astonished, and the former exclaimed, "What ! going up for men's examinations ! What good are we to get by educating these girls ?"

"With all this education and examination they must 'bake the bread,'" said the old aunt ; and, turning to Ratanbai, she added, "What are you going to do by learning ? Are you girls going to business now, and will you ask your husbands to mind the home ?"

Anandibai. I do not think Ratanbai ought to go to school any longer, but her father wishes it, and I cannot go against his wish or decision.

Kakubai. How is her mother-in-law inclined towards it ?

Anandibai. She has very little to say in the matter ; and since Ratan's father-in-law's death, she does not

behave as kindly as before, but of course her grief is overwhelming.

Kakubai (turning to Ratan). When you are at "*Sasar*"* does your mother-in-law send you to school?

"No"; said Ratanbai, unwillingly.

Kakubai. Then why do you send her to school here, Anandi? Does Vasudev know of this?

"I think so," said Ratan's mother, "but there has been some understanding between Ratan's father and the mother-in-law."

While this talk was going on a sad feeling took hold of Ratanbai, and she could not bear it any longer. She flung herself into her mother's lap, weeping most bitterly. She was such a darling in the house that the mother and the aunt could not endure to see her so troubled, and by caressing and coaxing, brought her to herself again. As she went away to wash her eyes, Anandibai whispered to Kakubai, "She cannot bear the idea of leaving school."

"I do not know what in the world you are going to get by educating her," remarked the old lady.

* The father-in-law's home.

"I admit there is no good to be got, but it is Ratan's father's doing," replied Anandibai.

"I will talk to him to-night and see," said the old lady.

Anandibai went into the kitchen for a moment, and Kakubai sat in silent meditation.

Just as Anandibai came back the servant walked in with a letter. "Keep it on the office table, *Bhaya*," said Anandibai to him.

"Bai Saheb, it is a telegram," answered the *Bhaya*.

At this they were both startled, and Kakubai exclaimed, "Why is there a telegram? where does it come from, and from whom?" They took it in their hands and turned it upside down, and looked it well over; the letters and the address were like Greek to them; they could not make out anything.

"*Bhaya*, is the postman standing outside? Ask him where it is from," said Kakubai.

"He has gone," said *Bhaya*.

The whole household was in a state of excitement and confusion, but within half-an-hour, to their relief, the wheels of the carriage were heard, and Mr. Vasudevrao appeared. The telegram was at once handed to him. He opened it and read, "*Brother dangerously ill, come immediately.*"

His face turned pale and he looked at his watch. It was half-past eight. Kakubai and Anandibai ventured to come out and asked what was the matter.

“Dinnanath is ill, and I must go by to-night’s train.”

Anandibai immediately rushed into the kitchen and served dinner for her husband. Then she put a few things in a bag, while Mr. Vasudevrao looked to see if he had sufficient money, and snatching the bag, he jumped into the carriage which had been ordered to return, and drove to the Victoria Station. On his way he stopped at a house where his head clerk resided, and told him to look after the affairs and the home people, and if there were any clients to send them to Mr. Chitnis, a friend and neighbour of Mr. Vasudevrao. He caught the train, and taking a first class ticket seated himself wearily, expecting the worst of news.

Kaku and Anandibai did not dine, but sat up with heavy hearts.

No one had noticed Ratan except the maid, who washed her eyes, and then both walked right upstairs to the top room, and as Ratan lay down, the maid sang softly some Hindu airs which sent her to sleep. Ratan’s father had

come and gone, and she had been perfectly ignorant of this, and even of the arrival of the telegram. She was, however, made to rise just before the household retired and take a little supper, after which she went to bed. Anandibai lay awake by her daughter's side until early morning, when she managed to get sleep for about an hour. Kakubai was simply prostrate. Every now and then she would exclaim : " Oh Narayan ! What will happen to Dinnath ? Oh ! do not make his wife a widow I beseech of Thee, O God." She would, however, resign herself by saying, " We must submit to Fate."

It was a sad night, indeed ; but all rose early and went about the daily duties. Mr. Vasudevrao did not write or telegraph. He had gone, and with his return, he would bring the news, whether good or bad, and the poor, anxious people in the house waited for his return every day. On the fifth day, two carriages drove to the door in the early morning. Mr. Vasudevrao got out of the first one ; and, without saying a word, walked in, and flung himself on a sofa in a disturbed manner. Out of the second carriage a most astonishing and pitiful figure stepped out, and seated herself on the ground, weeping loudly. Then, bending her head, which was shaved but

covered with her "*paadar*,"* she knocked it against a huge stone, and became desperate with grief. Anandibai and Kakubai rushed to the door and beheld Dinnath's widow. They shuddered at the sight. In the study they found Mr. Vasudevrao prostrate but silent. The two ladies gave way to their feelings, but Vasudevrao, with emotion, told them to be quiet, and to take in the poor girl for his brother's sake. Then Kakubai wailed loudly, and said: "The wretch has swallowed our Dinu! Why did she marry him? To eat him up in this way! Why hast thou brought this ill-luck into the house? She will surely swallow someone here. Our Dinu has gone, and she is nothing to us now"; and the poor old lady shook and wailed most pitifully. The young widow again knocked her forehead against a stone in desperate grief. She would have indeed preferred to have followed her husband on the funeral pile. Her life was a blank now. The light—the god of her life—was no more. "What is the use of living!" thought she. She fell backwards and appealed to the god of death. "Oh, Death! carry me away," exclaimed the poor, stricken creature; and with the last word she fainted

* The end part of the sari.

away. For two hours there was utter confusion, and no one would ask her to come in—not even the servant ; and there she sat on the bare ground, crushed with grief, until she fainted away. The fainting and falling attracted the people of the house, and the servant was ordered to bring some water, which was sprinkled on her face ; and when she came to herself, she was led into the verandah, where she sat down—a sight of pity and misery.

Poor little Ratan had now come to know of her uncle's illness and the cause of her father's journey. But all that had happened in the morning shocked her fearfully, for when the confusion and the weeping began, she simply stood aloof, and turned pale. She soon went to her mother's side ; and, holding her *sari*, she gave way to convulsive sobs and cries, until the father took her near him and quieted her.

To turn now to the place where Mr. Vasudevrao had proceeded after the arrival of the telegram.

The younger and only brother of Mr. Vasudevrao was Principal of a Government High School at Nasik, and this year the great festival "*Sinhasta*" was going on. These pilgrimages and festivals are more or less the cause of the malady—cholera—in up country places, and as usual the

cholera epidemic came, and carried off Mr. Dinnath, as well as a hundred others, leaving his wife, Tarabai, a widow of fourteen years.

Poor Tarabai had been married only the year before. Her father, Sittārām Krishnarav Sanzgiri, was a clerk in one of the Government offices, and had died when Tara was but a child. Then her mother, Shantabai, who lived with a relative away in the Konkan, was too glad to get her little girl married to a man of position and learning, for she felt the burden of life immensely after the death of her husband. Six months after marriage it was thought that Tarabai was big enough to look after the household affairs, so when Dinnath came to his brother for his holidays the last time, he took away his young bride to attend to the house, and if possible he meant to instruct her in the late hours of the evening. They lived very happily, but though it seemed a most fortunate lot for Tarabai, it was too soon embittered by the heavy blow she had now sustained in the death of her husband.

Mr. Vasudevrao had been devoted to his brother, and his death was a great blow for him too. The poor girl widow could not be sent to her mother, for she lived in an

out-of-the-way place, where people were very bigotted and foolish. So thinking the best thing would be to place his brother's wife under his shelter, he had brought her home.

The whole house now went into mourning, except Ratanbai, who no longer belonged to her own family, having been already married into another. The ladies were in the inner apartment, and friends, caste brothers and sisters and relations came in hundreds to pay visits of condolence. Mr. Vasudevrao kept to his office room, whither the gentlemen came. The ladies came and sat beside the mourners Anandibai and Kakubai. The young widow was in an inner apartment, prostrate on the ground. The mourners wept, and the visitors wept, and then the poor widow wailed loudly. Some of the old and ignorant ladies would even say hard things; but in all this visiting, no word of comfort or condolence was given to the stricken girl.

Ratanbai was very sad too, and she would nestle by her mother's side, and sob and weep. Anandibai and Kakubai could not touch anything for eleven days, so Ratan looked after the house, and made herself most useful and helpful. She had felt, however, very differently from her mother. Her young widowed aunt had touched her

heart, and though she lamented the loss of her uncle immensely, yet she sorrowed more for the poor widow. She could not realise the change. Six months ago, when Tarabai had left the house to go to Nasik with "*Kaka*,"* how beautiful she was! Ratanbai had unfolded the new black sari which was given to her on the occasion of her aunt's departure to her new home. How sweet Tarabai looked in the lovely red cashmere shawl as she stepped into the laudau, and drove to the station with her husband. "How nicely we got on ; we got to be quite friends. I loved her," thought Ratanbai ; and when she saw the same aunt, hardly to be recognised, *her* heart was not filled with hard and cruel thoughts. She loved her, and Ratan's resolution was to be kind to her while she kept house for the eleven days. She went to Tarabai every morning, and asked her to wash and take a little tea or milk. She again looked after her during mid-day, and saw that she slept comfortably at night. Many a time she sat by her, and said, "*Kaki*,† do not cry."

Whilst Ratanbai kept house, she rose earlier than usual, and first attended to the safe bringing in of the milk.

* Uncle.

† Dear Aunt.

They had two cows and a buffalo of their own. She took her bath, and next heated the milk on the fire, and poured it gently into brass cups, which she carried to the room of her mother and aunt. After asking her mother how much of the milk was to be kept for butter and curds, she accordingly gave orders to the servant in charge of these matters. Then she ordered breakfast; telling the cook what vegetables to prepare, and in what way they should be dressed. Her next occupation was to peel and cut up the potatoes carefully, and to wash the leafy vegetables. Then she went to the store-room, which was near the kitchen, and gave out the provisions to the cook. At about that time, too, the cow-boy and the buffalo-man and the coachman came for their supplies, and Ratan stood with keys in hand, while they took out the necessary quantities. If money was needed by the servants for "bazar" purchases, she went to her mother, who threw to Ratan her purse,* telling her how much money to take out. Ratan, having thrown the purse again to her mother, would give the amount to the servants. Shortly before

* Her mother was a mourner, and as such might not come into contact with anyone.

breakfast, Ratan undertook the duty of making bread (*polli* or *chupatties*), which her mother usually made, for Mr. Vasudevrao always liked what his wife had cooked. Ratan therefore (in her *soulè**) seated herself near the fire-place, with the kneaded flour and fresh *tup* (clarified butter) by her side and a board and rolling pin in front, to make the breakfast cakes. Adding plenty of butter, she rolled the dough again and again, clapping it between her tiny hands, it was then thrown into a clean iron pan over a slow fire. Ratan meanwhile made another cake, still keeping an eye on the cake that was being cooked, which needed to be turned every minute. When she had made enough, she buttered and folded the cakes, placing them carefully in a vessel kept for them only. Washing her hands, she told the cook that the lowest three cakes were for her father and the next two for Kakubai. These two had always food that was specially prepared for them. The meals now had to be served in each one's apartment, and Ratan helped in all this. She saw that everyone had a nice clean plate and sufficient water. First she attended to her father, and then to her mother and to her aunts. She herself had her meals

* A silk sari.

last of all, afterwards. Ratan then sat near a window on a low stool, with a quantity of rice near her, which she cleaned grain by grain to make it ready for cooking.* At about half-past one, visitors arrived and went on coming, and Ratan then quietly sat by her mother. In the evening there was another plain meal, except that for Mr. Vasudevrao something special was prepared, and Ratan always attended to this. Thus her days passed.

The days of the mourning were now over, and all went on as usual. Mr. Vasudevrao, as a sign of mourning, put a white head dress on instead of a coloured one. The ladies dressed as usual. The shock of grief, however, did not leave the family for some time, and what had passed was in constant remembrance because of the young widow being in the house.

Ratanbai, after an absence of nearly a month, began again to go to school. The news of her uncle's death had already been made known to all, and amongst the friends who had visited the afflicted family, some had come from the school. For two months there were no further interruptions.

* This is a daily household occupation for the women.



A KONKANASTHA BRAHMIN FAMILY.

CHAPTER III.

ONE evening Ratanbai on returning from school, rushed into the house, and embracing her mother, said : “ Mother, dear, Mrs. B——, who visits our school, has invited us to a party at her bungalow next week ; and the teacher told us to-day all those who come regularly to school, and do the lessons well, will be taken to this party : so you will let me go every day, won’t you ? ” pleaded the child. The mother promised ; but Kakubai, who was near, said : “ Why do you want to go to the English people’s houses ? They will give you something to eat, and defile you.” And, turning to Ratan’s mother, she added : “ Anandi, you had better tell Ratan that she must not eat anything there.”

Ratanbai. Is there any harm in eating the fruits ?

Kakubai. No ; you may have fruit, but do not touch anything else.

The day of the party arrived, and Ratan, who was

regular at school, came home early to dress. Her mother arranged her hair, and dressed her in a quiet but costly sari, allowing her no extra jewels except a nose ring. The girls were to start exactly at a quarter to four from the school, and Ratan was in the midst of the excited and happy party just ten minutes earlier. The carriages came one by one to the door, and the girls, in groups of five and six, took their seats, and drove up to Malabar Hill, to one of those beautiful bungalows which command a splendid view of the city and its surroundings. It was nearly eight o'clock when Ratanbai returned home, and after she had hurriedly thrown her shawl on the "*chowphala*,"* she sat down before Kakubai and began relating the evening's history. As Ratan began, Tarabai, who was in the inner apartment, drew closer to the door, and listened intently to her bright happy niece: "There were twelve carriages, and in each about six or seven sat. When we came to the house, Mrs. B—— and her daughter received us, and first we were taken into the cloak-room, where our shawls were kept, and each of us had a *veni* (flower-wreath) given her, which we put in our

* Swing.

hair. Then we went upstairs into the *Divankhana*. It was so pretty with mirrors and curtains, and pictures and piano. There were silk and satin sofas and chairs, and photographs were kept in silver frames. After a while we were told 'tea was ready.' At this the girls simply rose to their feet and said: 'No tea for us.' But Muktabai came near, and assured us that we were to have fruit and not tea. Then we went downstairs into the dining room. It is a large, beautiful room, with pretty pictures and mirrors, and any amount of glass things. There was a large table in the middle, and on it was a beautiful white cloth, and on this the plates, knives, forks, and glasses were arranged. There were fruits—mangoes, figs, grapes, oranges, plantains, custard apples, pineapples, and *pumbalows*. Beside these were *pedhe** and *barphi*.* All round this large table were chairs, and when we were told to take our seats it was such fun! We had never in our lives sat at table before, and at first we were all backward to do it; and when we did sit some of us made mistakes. Kamallabai and Nanibai sat together first on one chair, and we did laugh; Gangabai, while cutting a mango, cut her finger, and Balajipant, the Brahmin, had to take her outside to tie it

* Native sweets.

up. Some girls sucked the mango instead of cutting it, and the juice all ran down over the clean white cloth ; and one of the girls, while helping herself to an orange, hit a glass, which fell into bits on the floor."

Kakubai. Then you caused much damage to the poor, kind madam ?

Ratanbai. But she was most kind. First, we told her that we could not sit at the table and eat, but she would not listen, and so we did our best. There were so many kinds of fruits, and the table looked so pretty with the flowers ; and Balajipant was there to serve, so it was a regular Hindu repast.

Kakubai. After eating, how did you manage about the water ?

Ratanbai. Oh, then we were taken outside to the pipe, and Balajipant gave us water, and then we went into the playground at the back and had games. We played one or two English games, but the girls enjoyed "*zhima*"* and

* *Zhima*, is a game constantly played by girls. Four stand in a group, and they move on backwards and forwards in a circle, clasping one another's hands, and making a sharp noise with their finger and thumb. When the game is played fast, with many groups, it looks very graceful.

“*phugadi*”* most. After a little rest we went again into the Diwankhana, and heard singing and playing. Mrs. B—— played the piano, and Miss B—— sang. When Miss B—— began I thought she was crying, but we were told afterwards that that was the way English ladies sing. After the singing, Mrs. B—— taught us a new game called “Thimble,” and then I was asked to recite “Meddlesome Matty,” and Dwarkabai and Manjulabai played a duet on the piano. When it got dark we were anxious to return home, and as we rose to go, Mrs. B—— came near and told us that we must go and spend such evenings with her often, for it had given her much pleasure to have us there. She told us to be good girls and attend school regularly, and before long there will be another party for us. Sonabai then carried in the tray of flowers which we had brought from school, and I put the garlands round their necks. They were glad—but so surprised! Then one of the elder girls came forward and said a few simple sentences in English to thank the ladies. After this we

* *Phugadi* is played by two girls who stand opposite, their feet touching one another. They cross hands, and holding tightly, balance backwards and whirl round.

sang the Queen's "*stotra*"* and came downstairs. Mrs. B—— shook hands with us upstairs, and when we got into our carriages she came down and saw us again. She is so kind and beautiful, and her house is simply a little palace. The punkahs, the carpets, the curtains, and the mirrors were so pretty.

Here Ratan's mother said : "That will do now ; have some supper, and talk about your party afterwards. The whole night will not suffice for you to tell about it all."

"I have had so many fruits and sweets to-day," said Ratanbai, "that I do not feel much inclined to have supper. But I will try a little rice and '*sambarè*.'"[†]

As Ratan rose to go, Kakubai, with a disturbed look on her face, began, "I cannot think what enjoyment the girls find in going to parties. Why do we want all this? It is not so very essential. Did we have these enjoyments in our days? And yet we grew up and prospered. Where did we go to school? Did we even handle a book? We went to the temples daily and worshipped *Mārāṭi*.

* Hymn.

† A very tasty dish made of the juice of lentils.

We did household work, and attended to "*veni phani*."* The girls of these days want to go to school, to parties, to *sabhās*, and eat fruits from the "*mlench*"† hands. It is true the Brahmin served, but it was in the house of English people. We are Arya, but our Aryanism is getting all defiled. People are mad after English. Who are these English? Are not they incarnations of monkeys? only the tail is not allowed them. What if they are rulers? We must not forget our caste and religion! Truly sin is raging, and the world is coming to an end. Oh Narayan! do thou open the eyes of the people!" Thus talked Kakubai; and giving a deep sigh, she stretched herself on the floor for a nap.

Ratan went to sleep rather excited and tired that evening.

For six weeks all went on as usual. Then came the "*Shravana*" month. It occurs about in August, and every young Hindu wife is then kept very busy.

The first day of the month fell on a Saturday. Everyone in Mr. Vasudevrao's house was up at an early

* The toilet.

† Unclean.

hour. Washing and bathing were finished before day-break, and then hundreds of voices in the street were heard calling *shanvar vadha*.† The lowest caste women, with baskets on their heads, in which is an oil-can or bottle, a tin pot, &c., go on this day from door to door from a very early hour calling out *shanvar vadha*. Anandibai came out and beckoned to one of the women, who, laying her basket on the floor, took out a-half cocoanut-shell and held it before Anandibai, who stood aloof, catching her *sari* carefully, so as not to touch the woman. Holding a small cup, full of sweet oil, Anandibai waved it over the unfortunate woman's head and poured it into the shell, and afterwards looked at her reflection in it. Then giving her a few small articles, Anandibai went indoors, and the woman, placing the oil in the basket, which she put on her head, went away shouting the same words. The waving of the oil and the giving it away meant that all the abuse, the misery, and unhappiness of the family would rest on this woman, and she was contented with her lot, for according to the Shastras, her caste is bound to take the curse and misery in that fashion, so that the gods may be

† Please give alms on Shravana Saturday!

pacified. Many a time, however, she does not find that misery follows, and she always likes to get a good quantity of the oil, which is real gain to her.

After a while Ratanbai came out with *her* cup of oil, and, beckoning to one of the women, performed the same ceremony. The woman, instead of going away immediately, stood still and said, "Bai saheb, give me a *choli* ; see, mine is all torn," showing a worn-out bodice on her body. Ratan ran in, and said to her mother, "Mother, dear, may I give my green silk *choli* to her ? I do not wear it now, since the mango juice fell on it." To this her mother consented, and Ratan ran upstairs and fetched it, and held her hand forward for the woman to take it, but her mother saw her, and shouted, "Ratan, throw it at her, or else you will touch her." So Ratan, rolling it into a ball, threw it into the basket. The woman's eyes glistened, and her face beamed as she took it into her hand and looked at it, and with blessings and thanks, intimating that she would surely come the next Saturday, went away. The rest of the day was spent as usual.

The *Shravana* Monday is always observed as a fast, and there are four of these fasts. Ratan rose as usual, and took a little milk before going to school. This was

allowed her, because of her delicate constitution. Her mother and others fasted the whole day. The schools for girls at this season are always closed at 1 o'clock on Mondays, for the married girls and others arrive at school fasting. At 1, then, Ratan returned home, and she was hungry, so was allowed to take fruits. Fasting means generally going without *cooked* food; milk, fruits, and sweets are allowed. In the evening they all bathed, and broke their fast by taking a simple meal.

The *Shravana mangalwar*, commonly known among the Hindu ladies as the "*mangalagavri*" day, is a great day with the newly married girls. Ratan had been married now for more than a year, so she had nothing to do regarding it in her own home; but she was invited by a sister-in-law, who was newly married, and who thus had to keep the festival. On *mangalagavri* Tuesday Ratan, therefore, did not go to school, for she had to be at her father-in-law's, and she was to return home to go to Walkeshwar to attend the "*puja*" of the goddess at her sister-in-law's house. At 2 o'clock she dressed, and, with her mother, drove to Malabar Hill. Both the mother and daughter were received most warmly, and were led into a large room, where a number of young wives, dressed very

charmingly in their best *saris*, were seated on the floor most comfortably, talking in a noisy fashion. Among the young wives were some of Ratan's school companions. In a couple of minutes Ratan was in the midst of her friends, enjoying herself thoroughly. The mothers sat in groups also apart, and there was such a great noise, as all were talking, young and old—not, however, about the goddess, they were gossiping as to matters pertaining to themselves. The young people talked about school and home and *sasar*. In the meantime, Hirabai, Ratan's sister-in-law, fetched a match-box, and, walking towards the side where the shrine was adorned with lamps, candles, flowers, and a thousand ornaments, lighted the lamps. Anandibai, who was carefully examining the arrangements, said, “‘*Mangalagavri*’ is too far back, place her a little forward, Hiroo.” The young girl, who was dressed very prettily in yellow silk with silver trimming, lifted the folds of her sari in front, and stretching her small but jewelled arm, brought the goddess a little forward, and then turned to ask if it would do. “Yes,” said Anandibai; and the little wife went on with her business of worshipping it in the customary manner. Then, after treating her young friends with sweets, &c.,

the ceremony was at an end. Before 7 o'clock all the guests went away, and so did Ratan and her mother. This ceremony had to be performed the following three Tuesdays, and Ratanbai was always invited, so she and her friends had some pleasant meetings.

The *shravana* month, however, came to an end, and Ratanbai rejoiced to be once more regular at her studies. For a month she was able to go to school.

One afternoon, a distant relative called on Anandibai, and in the course of her conversation said : " I was at your Ratanbai's mother-in-law's, and your *Vihinbai** said, 'When Ratanbai is with us we never send her to school ; but her parents are inclined to be of the 'reformed' party ; and she, being the only child, they pet her, and send her just because *she* likes to go ; but they should consider our wish in the matter, and not allow her to attend school."

Both Kakubai and Anandibai were very troubled to hear this remark, and Kakubai, said " Anandi, tell Vasudev this to-night, and do not allow Ratan to go to school from to-morrow." Anandibai was very sorry for Ratan's sake, for though she herself was opposed to educating her daughter,

* The term used by the mother for the child's mother-in-law.

she allowed matters to take their course, because dear Ratan was so fond of her school and teachers.

Ratan, as usual, returned home in the evening, and after having washed and taken her "meal," she began to help her mother in the small household duties. Anandibai was a sensible lady, and knowing how it would hurt her child to hear what her mother-in-law had been saying to people all over the town, she kept silent. In the evening, when Mr. Vasudevrao returned home, the thing was secretly unfolded to him by his wife. But he took no notice of it. Then later on Anandibai again spoke to him about it, and he simply said, "Do as you please, Anandi. I do not know when you women will understand matters rightly." Here Kakubai interrupted. "Oh, Vasudev, you must remove the girl from school. If her *sasar's* people do not wish it, why should we go against them? You must save her from the '*sach*'* she will have." The old lady managed to persuade him, and at last it was decided that Ratan should not go to school from the next day.

Mr. Vasudevrao was very, very sorry ; but because they would not treat the question with reasonable consideration,

* Ill treatment.

he got tired of their arguments, and said, rather hastily, "Very well, remove her."

Ratanbai was kept in perfect ignorance of all this, and her mother was thinking as to how to tell her that she was not to go to school any more. Anandibai's anxieties were, for the present, soon over, for early the next morning a cocoanut arrived from Anandibai's sister Champubai's house, and that meant that a son was born. This was, indeed, happy news to all, and like an answer to her anxious prayer, for now the mother could prevent Ratanbai for a day, at least, on account of this news. The poor child was near her at the time the cocoanut arrived, and Anandibai, after having joyfully replied to the bearer that she would be there after the meal, gently said to her girl, "Ratanbai, we will go to *mavashi*,* so do not go to school, dear, to-day." To this the child assented, though in a disappointed manner.

After breakfast, Anandibai hurried to her sister's with her daughter to see the new born babe. They spent a few hours in Champubai's room. Anandibai sat and stood at a distance while she, with Ratan, looked at her new nephew.

* Aunt.

The little fellow was stared at very minutely, and after careful examination it was pronounced that he promised to be fair like the mother—to the satisfaction of all.

Amongst the many lady visitors (who were mostly relatives) Anandibai's elder sister was there. She informed all of her intended visit to Goa. The day for starting, she said, was fixed for the following Monday.

As Ratan had gone into another room with the young companions who, like herself, had come with their mothers, Anandibai said to her sister, "Will you take our Ratanbai to Goa, too? I must, however, ask her mother-in-law. We have now removed her from school, and I want her to be occupied, as she will, I fear, take it to heart; and, besides, it will be a nice change for her to go with you and Kamalla. Take her to the temples there, and show her our gods."

"If her mother-in-law allows her I shall take her; she will be good company to our Kamalla," said the sister, whose name was Sonabai. It was then decided to ask Ratanbai's mother-in-law, and if she consented to send her with Sonabai, her elder *mavashi*.* After partaking of

* Aunt.

refreshments, Anandibai rose to depart. Catching the corner of her *padar*,* and bringing it under her arm round her waist, where she tucked it, and throwing her handsome grey cashmere shawl across her shoulders, she took leave of her very revered mother, promising at the same time to come every day to see Champu.

The first thing Anandibai did after she got home was to send a most respectful message over to Ratan's mother-in-law asking her opinion about Ratan's accompanying her aunt Sonabai to Goa. To this the reply came, "Send her anywhere, but do not send her to school." It was, then, thus settled, but Ratanbai was kept in ignorance of her being removed from school. She was told to go to school and take two months' leave, to pay the fees for those months, and to tell the Bai that she was going to Goa with her aunt. Ratan obeyed sadly and reluctantly, and the teachers and the girls were very sorry indeed to lose her, though they were led to suppose, for a time only. Now, Mr. Vasudevrao's consent was to be obtained, and that duty was left to strict old Kakubai, who after an unpleasant struggle of four days, succeeded; and the next day

* The end part of the sari.

Ratanbai with a heavy heart started for Goa. The party consisted of eleven, including the servants. Ratan felt leaving her parents, as they did, too, at parting from her ; but she was very soon happy again, as she was with aunt Sonabai and her cousin Kamalla, to whom she was devoted. Before her marriage she used to spend a great deal of her time at her aunt's, and now, too, every now and then a special invitation was often sent to her to spend the day or evening with them. Anandibai and Kakubai, who could not help their tears when saying good-bye, were aware that she would be at ease with Sonabai and her children.

The party for Goa started early in the morning from the Carnac Bunder, in one of the coasting steamers, for Vengurlè, where they landed by sunset. Relatives who had been written to before-hand were on the pier to receive them. Soon they find themselves in one of the old-fashioned but strongly built houses in the heart of the town. They did not do much talking, as the sea-sickness, which had attacked almost all of them, made them quiet. A good tempting meal had been prepared for them, but though they sat "*at the leaves*,"* they only attempted to eat

* Portions of plantain leaves are still often used instead of plates.

a few mouthfuls. This country home, though owned by a very wealthy family, was furnished according to old customs of the place. There were no chairs, beds, or tables. The ground served instead for everything. There was an upper storey, and, in a large airy room, mattresses were most comfortably laid, where the beds had been arranged by the servants. The young people all retired just as they were. Sonabai and the ladies sat up talking for a while before retiring. The mother, with her four children and Ratan, all slept in a row. On the other side lay two other ladies with their five children. A dim light was kept burning the whole night.

Ratan was the first one to awake in the morning. She had had a good rest, and felt refreshed. She half lifted herself, and looking round, saw that all were asleep. Laying her untidy head on the low pillow, she gazed out of the open window at the lovely clear sky, and her thoughts wandered to her home and her mother. Then gently touching her cousin Kamalla, who lay rolled up in a sheet, she said, "Kamalla, get up." Her cousin, without saying a word or even opening her eyes, covered herself in the sheet, and turned her back to Ratan. So Ratan turned to the other side, and found her little boy cousin smiling gleefully,

and kicking his fat little limbs. She played with him until something displeased him, and then he set up a terrible shriek, which woke all in the room. The servants were up, and were now busy getting the baths ready. By eleven o'clock the whole household was up. Bathing over, they sat down to a substantial breakfast. The rice, bread, milk and butter all tasted most delicious. After breakfast, a little loitering about took place, and arrangements were made for the onward journey. In the afternoon, some of the shrines in the town were visited, and though Ratan was feeling very strange, yet she enjoyed it all.

The following day they started for the next place, and two months were spent in visiting the temples and shrines and in travelling. During this time Ratanbai constantly wrote to her teachers and school friends of the pleasant time she was having. Here is one of her letters :—

Sawantwadi, Nov. 13.

My dear Manjulabai,—Much affectionate respect. I received your letter, and I was very glad to read the news. Now our next address is *Ganpat Shantaram Vaidya's* house, No. 2, Kolapur. We visited the shrine of ——— and worshipped them. We bathed

in the tank, too. We went to the "*Vada*"* and saw the *Rani Saheb*.

The hills and the valleys are beautiful, and the air so pleasant. We do not know when we shall return. I am, however, enjoying the travelling. Remember me most gratefully to all the teachers.

When we went to see the *Rani Saheb*, she made me sing, and asked me many things. I am so sorry to lose my lessons, but you must let me know the lessons you are learning, and as I have brought a few books with me, I will learn them up, so as not to fall too behind. I hope all at home are quite well.—Your dear friend,

RATAN.

The teachers, knowing *Ratanbai* was out of town, were not surprised at her absence ; but one morning, one of the girls brought the news to school that she was never coming again. This news was received with much disappointment. *Ratanbai* and her aunt stayed away for a fortnight longer than had been intended, and after their return *Ratan* was sent to her mother-in-law's ; it was there only that she came to know she was not to go to school any more. Never was she to handle a book now. "I wish I had known how to converse in English. *Sasubai* should have



A GROUP OF HIGH CASTE YOUNG HINDU WIVES.

(In Mrs. Nikambé's School.)

kept me at school till then ; no pleasure or interest for me now. Oh ! what shall I do with myself the whole day ? ” The young girl’s heart was full of grief ; but she knew she must submit to the *Sasu’s* rule, and she tried to be brave about it.

Four months passed, and Ratan’s life grew dull and cheerless. She did not know how to while away the time without books or some sort of pleasant occupation. She did attend to the household duties : sometimes she sat cleaning the rice, sometimes sewing, or she had to make the sweets ; but, literally, her day was mostly spent in doing nothing. At the mother-in-law’s, she would simply sit through the long hours of the day with her mother-in-law and the other ignorant lady, and they would stare out of the windows from time to time or fall asleep on the mat. Ratanbai was most miserable, and she longed to be at school. How often, with an aching heart, she would sit dreaming about the school life ! Her teacher, her companions, her singing lesson, the English lesson, the translation class, came before her, and then the longing would come : “ Oh ! could I but go to school once again ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

THOUGH Ratan was taken from school, she was allowed, whenever she was at her father's, to pay a visit to her friends at the school house. Her young husband, Prataprao, was permitted to continue his studies, in spite of the threatening difficulties since his father's death. A distant relative was meantime appointed to look after his father's estate. Prataprao attended the Wilson College, and here the sound education he received, and the exemplary lives he came in contact with day after day, made a great impression on his young heart, and prepared him for the life before him. In appearance he was inclined to be tall and slender. His complexion was fair, his eyes were dark and bright. He dressed, like all Hindu students, in a *dhotar** and long coat. His head was always covered

* The Hindu gentleman's dress.

with the prettiest of embroidered caps. He wore his *bikbali*, and gold ring, and his dear father's gold watch and chain. He was very fond of his mother, and respected her much. His two sisters and a younger brother loved their *dada*,* and looked up to him as a pillar in the family now, since their father's death.

When Ratan was removed from school, Prataprao was in his B.A. course. Six months passed; Nagnathrav, the husband of Ratanbai's cousin, Kamallabai, was successful in the B.A. examination of the Bombay University, and won a medal. So rejoiced were his parents at this event that they told their son he might ask for any present, however costly, and they would give it him in memory of this brilliant success. The young man, instead of asking for a diamond ring, or a horse and carriage, said to his father, "Father, nothing will give me so much pleasure as to see my wife being educated at a good school. If my choice is asked, may I request you to prevail upon mother to consent to this only?" The request was made known to the loving mother, who, though disappointed, granted it for her darling boy's sake; thus

* Elder brother.

they all began thinking about sending Kamallabai to school. Within a week's time it was settled, and as Kamalla would be very lonely at school, it was suggested that Mr. Vasudevrao be asked to allow Ratanbai to accompany her for a few months.

When, however, Mr. Rambhao (Kamalla's father-in-law) came to Mr. Vasudevrao, the latter said, "I am sorry to say my daughter is not in my hands. If you can persuade her mother-in-law and the other lady, Kashinathpant's wife, in the matter, nothing will give me more pleasure, for I am in favour of our girls and women being educated. If some lady were to open a class for the married ladies, I would be the first one to send Anandi. I am thinking, however, of getting a native lady to come to my house and teach her. If Ratan were in my charge, I would send her to school to-day. I would not have allowed her to be kept at home at this early age, when she was getting on nicely, too ; but our girls are not ours when married !"

Mr. Rambhao was well acquainted with Ratan's father-in-law's people, so one evening he went to them for a friendly visit. After a long talk on various matters, the subject was introduced, and so heartily was it taken up by Mr. Kashinathpant (Ratan's late father-in-law's brother)

that he at once went towards the apartment of his widowed sister-in-law, and, standing by the half open door, said : “ Rambhao has come. He is going to send his daughter-in-law to school. Her husband, Nagnath, has passed the B.A. examination, and has gained a big prize. Which school shall we recommend for Kamalla? Do you know anything of Ratanbai’s school ? ”

Ratan’s mother-in-law came near the door, but without showing herself—the door being half closed—and said : “ Yes, it is a nice school, and the only one where big girls go.”

“ Do you know who ought to be seen there ? ”

“ No ; but Ratan would know.”

Here Mr. Rambhao rose, and coming near the door, said : “ Our Kamalla is very shy, and would like to have a companion until she gets used to the school ; so will you have any objection to send Ratanbai with her ? ”

Ratanbai’s mother-in-law did not answer for a while. Then she said, “ I will ask my ‘ Bala ’ ”* (Ratan’s husband, Prataprao).

Mr. Rambhao knew “ Bala ” well ; so now his next duty was to catch hold of him immediately. After spending

* A pet name. .

the evening very happily, he rose and took leave, and was walking out of the compound, when, to his surprise and pleasure, Prataprao, who was returning home from a Sunday evening lecture in the College, stood before him. After exchanging greetings, Mr. Rambhao and he walked out together, and went to the sea beach. It was a lovely moonlight night; the clouds had all rolled away, and the stars were dimly twinkling overhead. The Back Bay waters lay cool and smooth in the basin, and just where Mr. Rambhao with Ratan's husband stood, the playful waves ran in and out between the black stones. The city was chiefly lit up by this lovely silvery atmosphere, though a few dim lights could be seen. They stood on the beach admiring nature in her evening attire. Behind them were the new-fashioned dwelling houses recently erected and half occupied. They walked up and down the paved path, and then down to the sands, and seated themselves on a large piece of rock. Mr. Rambhao talked on many matters, and then began about education, just to see Prataprao's turn of mind about it, and to his great happiness he found that Ratan's husband was in favour of education for women. Mr. Rambhao then spoke to him about the young wives being educated, told him of the

attempt they were making to send Kamallabai to school, and at last asked Prataprao to consent to Ratan's going, should his mother speak to him about it. Prataprao quietly listened, and assented to the final request. Within an hour each went to his house. Mr. Rambhao had gained his object, and it is no exaggeration to say that young Prataprao was happy.

After two weeks, on a bright Tuesday morning, Ratan was dressed in a pretty navy blue *sari* (a favourite among her *saris*), with a handsome silk border. It was worked in Indian embroidery, with white cotton. She looked charming with her bright red Brahmin shoes, and the gracefully folded dress and the flower-wreath in her hair. A new bag was in her hand, and she carefully put in it her old books and other school necessities. "Mother, dear, I feel ashamed to go to school now," Ratan said. "Won't the girls laugh at me?" "Why will the girls laugh?" replied Anandibai. "You know them all, and you like going to school. Besides, Kamalla will be constantly with you." Just then the carriage came to the door, a victoria with a beautiful brown horse. Ratanbai put on her *shalu* while the Bhaya placed her bag in the carriage. She lightly stepped in, the Bhaya attending on

her. Driving to Kamalla's house, and taking her up, they went on towards the school. The teachers and the girls were delighted to see Ratanbai among them again, and they welcomed her cousin most cordially. The time passed very happily. As the singing teacher did not come, the girls were allowed a longer recess, and Ratan joined in all the games. So did Kamalla, who was already pleased with the school and her companions, and thought the life there was indeed happy and bright. In the afternoon, when the lessons were being taken, Ratan found herself very behind her classmates. When she was told to sit in the lower standard she did not like it, and said to her teacher, "Instead of going into the lower standard, may I go on with the class? I will ask father to find a teacher for me at home, and with him I will work up the back lessons." She said this in such a resolute but sweet way, that the teacher gave her a fortnight's trial ; within that period, if she did not show progress, then it would be clear that she must stay in the lower class. Her cousin Kamalla was put in the "extra" class, where the new girls were prepared in the necessary subjects. Ratan assented to her teacher's arrangement by saying, "I will learn all the lessons." She and her cousin left at the

usual hour, and each had much to tell to the ladies at home. It was arranged by Mr. Vasudevrao that the victoria should be at the disposal of Ratan for her school, and that she should always call for Kamalla on the way, and drop her on the way back.

Ratan was now very happy with her studies. At home she had a teacher morning and evening, and in school all her spare moments were either spent with a book in hand, or at her desk writing some exercise. The fortnight passed, and the day for Ratanbai's examination arrived. It took three hours. All her exercise books she showed first; every lesson up to date was neatly written. Then she read, spelt, translated, did some writing and arithmetic, grammar, history, and geography, and in all except geography she did well. The manner in which she had taken pains and persevered, pleased the teacher greatly, and she was told to sit in her class with the old companions. Ratan was delighted, and she resolved now to take more pains with her lessons.

Ratan's mother-in-law consented to her going to school at the desire of Prataprao. She was allowed to continue for some months, and she tried to make the best of the opportunity allowed her.

After six months, however, discouragement came. Ratanbai's husband failed in his B.A. examination, which was a great disappointment to all. But Ratan, about the same time, passed in the annual examination of the school very successfully, and was to receive the first prize in the class at the prize distribution to be held in about a month's time. These two incidents—her husband having failed, and she having passed in her school examination—were thought of very seriously by the ladies of Ratan's "*sasar*,"* and the result was that her mother-in-law sent word to Mr. Vasudevrao that her daughter-in-law should be immediately taken from school.

The message came through a relative, and was delivered in the presence of Ratanbai. As soon as she heard it, she flung herself on her mother's neck, and wept. "*Baba*,"† she said, "do let me go till the prize-giving! I am to get a prize, and the Governor's lady is coming. Oh, do let me stay till then!" The relative, who was an elderly old-fashioned lady, said to Ratan, "Your husband has failed, and what do you want with school and prizes now? Pray

* Father-in-law's house.

† Father.

to the gods, go to the temples and pay the vows, that *he* may have success."

Ratan kept silent. She did feel so sorry, and the disappointment could be seen in her sad face. That evening she went upstairs into the top room and cried herself to sleep. She refused to rise and have supper, and when her mother went to her she simply wept.

After much discussion that night between the ladies and Mr. Vasudevrao, it was decided that Ratan should not attend school any more, and that she must stay away from the very next day. It greatly disheartened her, and Mr. Vasudevrao was sorry for Ratan's sake, but more so on account of her husband. Her cousin Kamallabai felt very grieved, and though she had got to like the school and the girls, she greatly missed Ratan.

The next day an invitation arrived for Ratan to go and stay a few weeks at Bandora, a suburb near Bombay, and on the following Saturday, Kamalla and Ratan, with two servants and a host of boy cousins, travelled thither. Ratan's grandmother lived here with her two married sons. A little cousin baby—the first and only child in this house—had died a fortnight ago, and as the house looked dull and gloomy, the children, with Ratan and Kamalla, were

asked to spend a few days with the family, so that it might be made more cheerful. The little boys were found to be very troublesome and self-willed, and so were sent back to Bombay after four days—Ratan and Kamalla stayed longer. During this time, they not only helped to lighten the sad home, but had many a talk by themselves, which helped to increase their mutual attachment.

They took long walks and drives by the beach with their aunts, and had a time of real change and rest. After four weeks, Kamallabai was obliged to return for school to Bombay, so Ratan was left alone. Her aunts were very fond of her, and made much of her, and did not allow her to be lonely or sad. After two months, the grandmother, with her two daughters-in-law, came to Bombay, and Ratan accompanied them, and returned home.

Prataprao, in his disappointment, had not at first noticed how his girl-wife was treated, but when he set to his studies with a resolute will, he quietly spoke to his mother about Ratan being sent again to school. His request was very reluctantly granted. Kashinathpant's wife tried to interfere, but somehow the young husband was successful in this effort. By-and-by, as the days of his

examination drew near, Ratan's mother-in-law thought that if her son should succeed, his wife might be kept longer at school in spite of the hateful remarks of the caste brethren.

The month of December arrived, with the examination, and Ratan was kept at home to make offerings to the gods that there might be success. A month after, when the results were declared, she came to school with a bright beaming face, saying nothing, however, but simply greeting everyone with a smiling countenance. All knew that her husband had passed his examination. During the "recess" hour one of the girls brought to her the *Times of India*, in which was the list of the successful candidates. Ratanbai quickly glanced down the list, and came to the name which, according to custom, never passed her lips except in a song or a rhyme. She burst out laughing to her heart's content, as half-a-dozen young wives repeated the name *Pratap Harischandra Khote* aloud. She again took the paper, and read aloud two or three names of the husbands of her friends who were among the successful candidates of some other examination. All who knew Prataprao congratulated him on his success, and especially his relatives, who were very happy, encouraged him to

go to England. This event greatly encouraged Ratan, and she now resolved more than ever to take pains with her studies.

About eight months had passed, and the clever, persevering Ratanbai appeared to her teachers to be growing a careless girl. Day after day, whenever she came to school from her mother-in-law's, she did not know her lessons, nor did she write any home exercises.

As she had been one of the best girls, for a couple of months she was forgiven and was not "kept in." At last matters came to such a pass that she could not be allowed to escape without being punished. One day she was made to sit in the "kept in" class, and was very ashamed, but she said to her friends, "It is better to learn here than not learn at all," and she without murmur quietly submitted to the punishment. Just before going home, Ratan went to see her teacher, who said to her, "I do not like to see you, Ratan, in the 'kept in' class. Won't you now take pains, and give no further trouble?" To this the little wife simply nodded.

About twelve days after, one morning Ratanbai walked into the school house with swollen eyes, biting her lips. She threw her shawl down in the room and rushed into

the Girls' Room upstairs, and, throwing herself on the sofa, burst out crying, and sobbed and sobbed until her cousin came and sat by her.

Kamalla. "What is the matter, Ratanbai?"

Ratan (sobbing). "Oh, dear. What shall I do?"

Kamalla. "But tell me what is the matter? Is anyone ill? Or did *Sasu* scold you?"

Ratan had hid her face in her *padar*, and, wiping her eyes, she said—"No, I can bear *sasubai's* scolding. I wish it was her scolding!"

Kamalla. "Then what is it—tell me, can't you?"

Ratan. "See, the door is open and someone will hear us. If the classes have gone into the rooms for lessons, go and ask the teacher if you may sit with me for a while, and then I will tell you." Here Ratan's eyes filled with tears, and her face was covered in her *padar*.

Kamallabai went to ask for the permission, which was fortunately granted, and the door having been locked from the inside, Ratan began to pour her troubles.

Ratunbai. "She will not rest until she sees me away from school. Everything has been done to prejudice my mind about education, but I have held on, and, somehow, by God's help, things have fallen to my lot happily. All

these days I have been scolded and punished in school for not learning my lessons properly, and I have had to bear another trouble at home ; for I am never allowed to open my bag or to handle a book. Vithabai has made it her business of late to keep me away from school. In the evenings, when I go home, some work is sure to be ready for me, and I must attend to it. Then, when I *have* spare time, I must sit on the swing and gossip about all sorts of rubbish or listen to the novels, and before it is nine I must be in bed. My mornings are spent in nearly the same way, only we are busier, for the breakfast is required early. But there is not so much work after all. You know Vithabai and her nature ; she is against education, and therefore is trying her best to remove me from school. I cannot speak to Sasubai, because sometimes she tells things to Sasubai in such a way that I get the worst of it, so I just keep quiet."

Kamalla. " And we dare not tell at our *Māhèra** what happens at *Sasar*."

Ratan. " Oh, no !"

* Father's house.

Kamalla. "Tell me, what happened to-day."

Ratan. "Oh, dear! All these days she tried her best to prejudice my mind, and now to-day it has gone so far that I do not know what to do." Here Ratanbai buried her face in her *padar* and burst out crying, and went on sobbing and weeping for about a quarter of an hour. Kamallabai could not bear to see her cousin so unhappy, and she, too, sat with her *padar* to her eyes and told Ratan to be quiet. They composed themselves, and Ratanbai began: "This morning I went about as usual in the house. I served the breakfast, and helped in matters here and there. When it was ten I got ready for school. Bringing my shawl and bag out, I asked Vithabai if I might go. To this she said"—here Ratan's eyes again filled with tears, and her *padar* was up to her face again. After a pause she continued—"I was just asking, when she said, 'School! school! school! Wait, let Prataprao come this evening, I will tell him that I saw you looking at the gardener with an evil eye, and then after your mother-in-law comes to know of it we shall see how you will go to school,'" and Ratan, who was sitting erect, flung herself backward, and burying her face in her arms and *padar*, sobbed most bitterly, only saying now and then, "Oh,

dear ! what shall I do ? ” The two girls sat together, one shocked and the other giving way to convulsive sobs. No one else knew the secret of Ratan’s persecution. Both girls went home that evening with hearts full of thought and anxiety.

The next few days Ratan did not go to school. One afternoon, as she sat before her mother-in-law with folded hands, a servant came from her father’s house, and saluting, said, “ Rao Saheb has sent me to fetch Ratanbai. Bai Saheb has been ill since last night.” Ratan, hearing this, turned pale, and looked at her mother-in-law, waiting for the consent as to whether she might go. Her mother-in-law told her to go, and she flew into the room for her shawl, which she threw hurriedly over her shoulders, asking, “ Where is the carriage ? ” She was told it was out on the road. With tears in her eyes she took leave of her mother-in-law, and rushed through the garden, and took her seat in the carriage. They drove very fast, and she was soon at the door. There was great confusion. Four doctors were in the house. The neighbouring ladies had come in. Mr. Vasudevrao was wringing his hands, and Kakubai and the other ladies were weeping. Ratan did not know what to do. At last Kaku caught sight of her, and wailed loudly,

“ Ratan, dear Ratan, come and see *ayce*. ”* Ratan went, and oh ! the sight she beheld. Her mother lay lifeless and pale on a bed. The crowd about her were in terror, and were waiting for the doctors’ verdict. Ratan could not believe that was her mother. She looked about the room, and fainted away. The doctors attended to her and sent her to another apartment. After the usual examination, it was said that Anandibai had died of some affection of the heart. The blow was terrible. The news soon spread throughout the town. The priests were informed of it, and they came with the materials for the bier. Anandibai was immediately bathed and dressed in yellow. Her forehead was rubbed with the *kunku* ; and flowers in garlands and loose were scattered over her body. Relatives and friends in hundreds flocked to Mr. Vasudevrao’s house. There was a good deal of wailing and crying ; and as the body was being carried to be laid on the bier, it was heart-rending to hear the continued weeping. Mr. Vasudevrao groaned, and Ratan threw herself on the bier. The funeral dress of the men, whose heads were bare, was entirely white. A cocoanut was placed in Anandibai’s

* Mother.

hands, and four gentlemen lifted the bier, and away it went amidst the din and wailing of all the ladies and the gentlemen who stayed behind. Anandibai's remains were carried through the town in a procession, and the funeral was attended by six hundred gentlemen.

By ten o'clock all was finished.

The woman who so devotedly and faithfully filled her position as wife, mother and sister was no more. The house looked desolate, and Mr. Vasudevrao could not believe that he was still in this world. As for poor Ratan, who can describe the pain in that troubled young heart?

For eleven days friends and acquaintances crowded in after one o'clock to pay their visits of condolence. Mr. Vasudevrao, as a sign of mourning, shaved off his moustache and dressed in white. Numbers came to comfort the family, and the relatives flocked round Mr. Vasudevrao. On the seventh day, the bathing and purification took place. Still friends kept on coming for about a month. Ratan went to her aunt Sonabai, and Kakubai and Tarabai went to Bandora. Poor Tarabai was very unkindly treated, because of this unhappy event. Kakubai in her wailing often said, "Tara, you have brought this ill-luck, and you have been the cause of our misery."

One day, at Bandora, Kakubai spoke very, very unkindly to the young widow, who thinking that she really was the cause of misery to others, resolved to do away with her life. She generally went to bathe on the beach, which was five minutes' walk from their house. After having planned all, she went out one morning early, and was in the act of throwing herself into the sea when a Hindu reformer, who was taking a walk, saw her and went to her rescue. He knew that the cause of this calamity was ill-treatment, as Tara's very appearance betrayed that she was a girl widow. This eventually led to her being sent to a Widows' Home with Mr. Vasudevray's consent.

Days passed very quietly now. At last the October vacation came. Mr. Vasudevray did not this time go, as usual, to his house in the country, but went away to the north, visiting the ancient and sacred places. Ratanbai continued to stay with her aunt until her father's return, spending the latter part of the time with her mother-in-law.

* * * * *

Five years have rolled away. Mr. Vasudevray looks much older; Ratan's husband has been to London, and has studied during three years for the Bar. At the time of his departure he left strict instructions, which

were carried out, that Ratan should be sent to school until his return home. Tarabai is still in the Home, where she has studied and been trained as a teacher. She looks very sweet in her "reformed" dress. Her hair has grown again. Her head is no longer covered, but like the other ladies she wears her *padar* on the shoulder. She has no "kunku" and no ornaments, not even glass bangles. She wears a print jacket, and puts on a shawl when out of doors. Kakubai is shocked at the new ways in the family. She does not like the idea of Ratan going to school, nor does she approve of Tara's education, nor of Ratan's husband's going to England. She has asked Mr. Vasudevrao for a considerable sum of money, which he has granted her, and she has set out on a long pilgrimage. There was a great blank in the family circle while Ratan's husband was in England.

After a successful career he has returned home, *via* America, Japan and China, visiting the interesting places on the way.

About a week after his arrival, one beautiful day, the people at Ratanbai's *sasar* seemed to be unusually busy. There is a great bustle among the ladies, and preparations were being made for a quiet ceremony in the evening.

The time arrives, and the guests, all ladies, drop in one by one. They are dressed very quietly. The little children are dressed in their pretty costumes. In the inner apartment two pretty seats with lighted lamps, and silver utensils, are facing each other. The ladies and the children all squat on the floor in front. By and bye Prataprao walks in and takes his seat on one of the low stools. Then follows Ratanbai, who is dressed in the most charming ruby coloured *pilao*, with jewels and flowers, looks a select “*ratna*”* herself. She bashfully and gracefully stands on the opposite stool, and drawing the silver utensils (basin and water jug) closer, says :—

The water is clean and the silver is pure,
May Prataprao's fame ever endure.

At this the young husband allows his wife to wash his feet in the silver basin. She soon dries them with a towel ; then taking some scented powder says :—

Spring has come and birds do sing,
But Prataprao's virtues joy will bring.

To his arms then this powder is applied. Then she

* Jewel.

draws a large tray, and holding a huge garland of flowers says :—

Flowers and foliage are pretty to behold.

Prataprao's name gives delight untold.

when the garland is put round her husband's neck.

Then she gives the bouquet in his hand, and while doing so says :—

Great were the men who adorned our land ;

And greater be Prataprao of the band.

The *panvida** is then given, and when doing so she says again :—

Spring is the best season of all ;

May richest blessings on Prataprao fall.

Ratan's rhymes were listened to very attentively by the ladies. She soon took her seat on the stool, when Prataprao took up a flower wreath in his hand, and said :—

It rains, it lightens, it thunders !

Ratan, mind don't you make any blunders.

and gives the wreath in Ratan's hand, who then and there puts it into her hair.

* The folded leaf.

While giving the scent he said :—

In this house you are installed as queen ;

Therefore, Ratan, let your good example by all be seen.

Then the *vida* is given, and Prataprao says while giving :—

Ratan has prayed for blessings on me ;

I in return, dear, pray the same for thee.

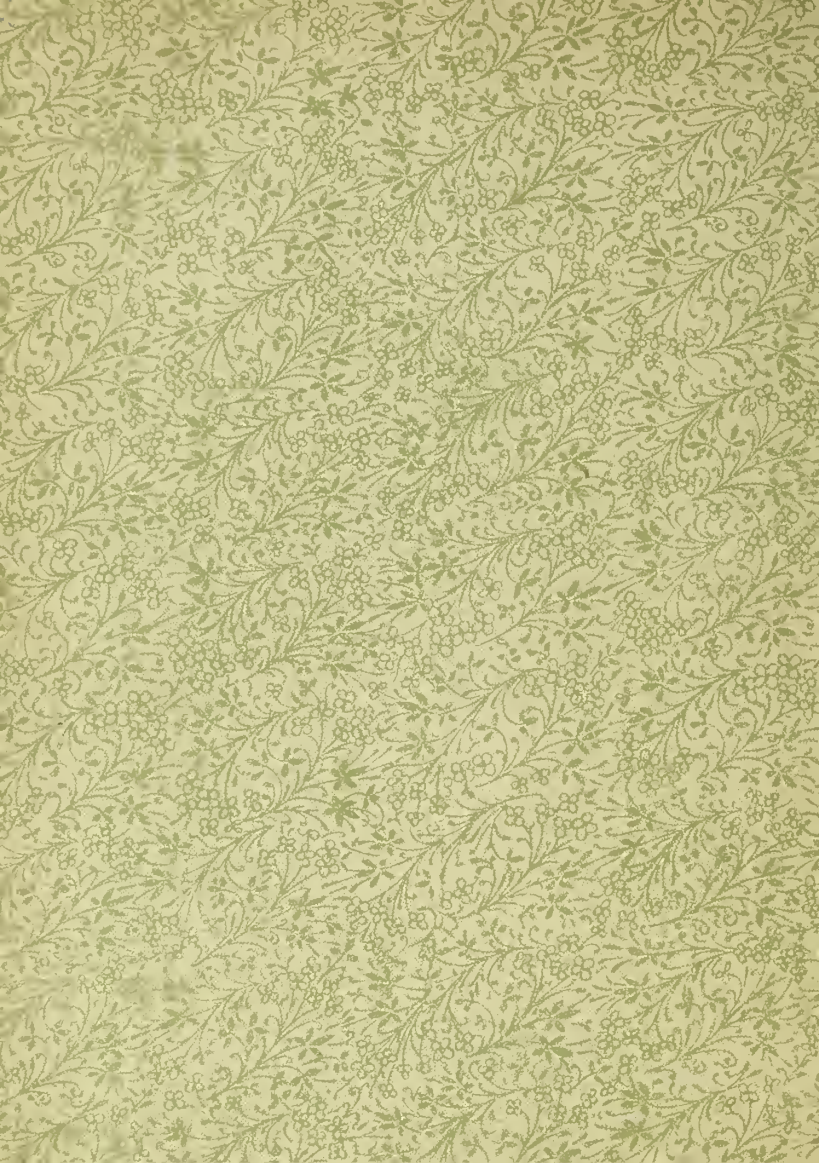
The husband and wife, without exchanging any words or looks, rise quietly ; Ratan mixes amongst the ladies, and Prataprao goes silently into the drawing room. The dinner immediately follows, and whenever it is Ratanbai's turn to serve some joke is passed round among the children, who do their best to keep Prataprao lively.

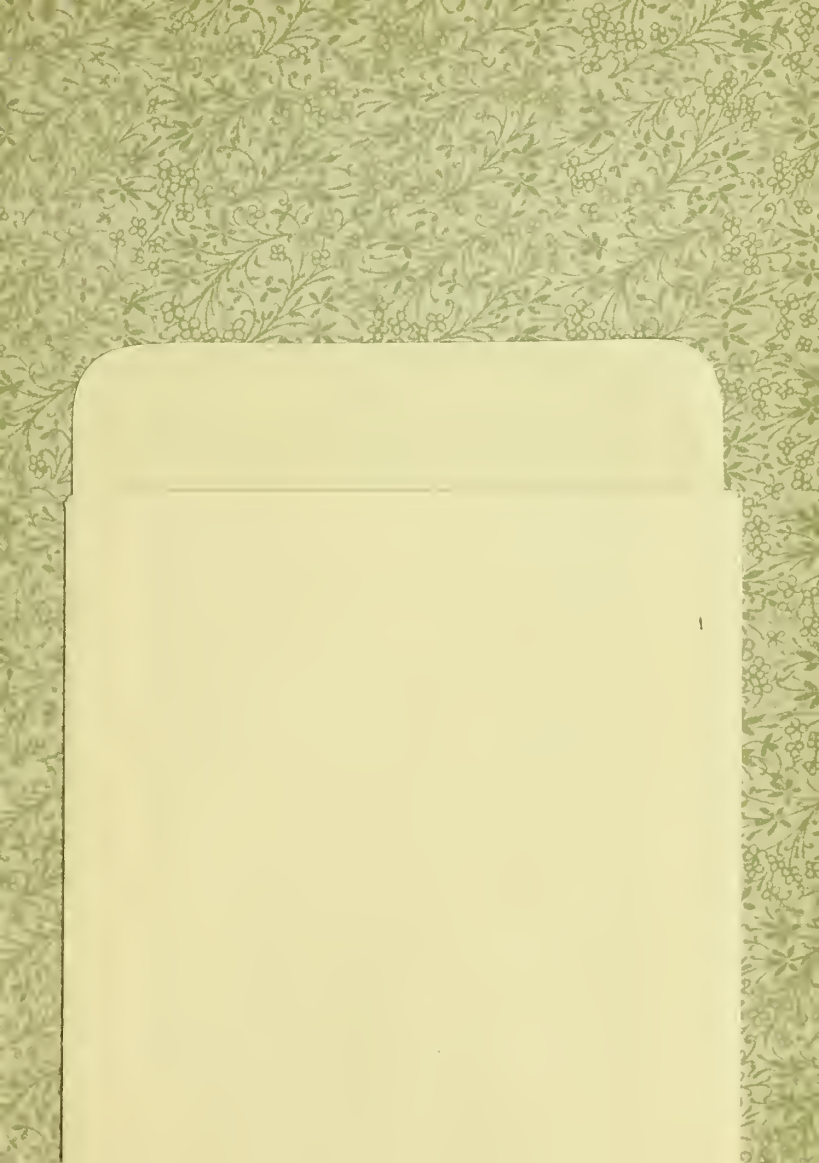
The guests go away after the dinner, and in the newly furnished room upstairs Ratanbai is looking at the numerous presents on the table and writing-desk when her eye falls on a beautifully bound gilt-edged Book. She grasps it, and is about to open it, when Prataprao, who is by her, seeing his young wife admiring the Book says : “ I must have this Book on my table every day ; there are a great many nice things in it which you must know.” To this Ratanbai said : “ I have this Book too.” “ Well,” said

her husband as he looked into his young partner's face, "then let yours be out too, and we shall make it our guide in life."

Thus Prataprao Khote claims young Ratanbai as his partner in life. They begin life together, recognising the responsibilities and duties which lie before them, and which concern not only themselves but their people and their country.

SHĒVANTIBĀI M. NIKAMBĒ.





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